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Aides Say U.S. May Ease Arms Stance at Geneva

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 9 — Preliminary results from a new interagency study show that the United States may be able to relax demands for deep cuts in the throw weight of Soviet long-range missiles.

The Soviet Union is far ahead of the United States in throw weight — the warhead payload that can be lifted off and carried to a target. American insistence on dismantling most of the Soviet large land-based missiles, which account for most of the throw weight, has been a stumbling block in the talks on reducing nuclear arms of strategic, or intercontinental, range, now recessed in Geneva.

Government officials, when asked about the interagency study, said it indicated that improvements in missile accuracy by both sides made throw weight a less critical factor. According to this view, a highly accurate warhead is found to be almost as effective against a target hardened by concrete, such as a missile silo, as a larger, less accurate warhead.

Study by a Group of Experts

The study was done by civilian and military experts from the Pentagon, the Central Intelligence Agency, the State Department, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and the staff of the National Security Council.

Intelligence estimates in the study suggest that, as the Russians modernize their missile force, they will reduce throw weight of their own accord. This assumes that they will agree to American proposals for reductions in numbers of missile warheads and will deploy small mobile missiles with single warheads and greater accuracy.

These and other judgments in the study will be reviewed by a high-level group under the chairmanship of William P. Clark, the President's national security adviser. This group will make recommendations to President Reagan before the Geneva talks resume Oct. 5.

Officials report a growing desire in the White House to make a conciliatory move. This could take the form of modifying the demand for a cut in the combined number of warheads on land-based and sea-based missiles by a third, to 5,000, or raising of the proposed subceiling of 2,500 for warheads on land-based missiles.

More likely, according to the offi-

cials, the United States may modify its proposed three ways to reduce the Soviet advantage in throw weight.

One calls for a reduction of the number of Soviet large land-based missiles to 210 from the present 800.

Another calls for a cut in the Soviet overall throw weight from 5,950 tons to some figure above the American total of 2,100 tons. In such an event, it has been suggested, the United States may be prepared to drop the subceiling of 2,500 on land-based missile warheads.

Failing both of these, a third way would be for Moscow to put forward a proposal of its own for reducing its superiority in throw weight.

A draft treaty put forward by the United States on July 8 incorporates only the proposed limit of 5,000 on missile warheads. The other numbers have been presented orally by Edward L. Rowny, the chief negotiator.

Study Was Requested in June

Officials said the interagency study had been requested by President Reagan in June after he announced that he was dropping the demand that the Soviet Union reduce its total number of missiles, as distinguished from the warheads they carry, by two-thirds and the United States by one-third, to an equal ceiling of 850.

No new total was given, but American negotiators have talked about 1,200. At the same time, they proposed a separate limit of 400 on long-range bombers for each side.

The Soviet proposal has been for an overall ceiling of 1,800 on missiles and bombers, with various subceilings, to be reached by 1990.

According to a number of officials who have seen the new study, it suggests that throw weight has become less important in view of advances in missile accuracy. From this, and based on intelligence regarding Soviet

programs, the study concludes that Moscow may in the course of modernizing develop smaller and more accurate missiles.

Officials said the Russians have been testing a small mobile missile with a single warhead and a medium-heavy missile that fit the projected pattern.

"It is possible that the Soviets are headed toward no more than 3,000 land-based missile warheads over the next 10 to 15 years," one official said.

Some Insist on a Limit

Moreover, officials said, there is much in the study to support the view that, if Moscow accepted a limit of 5,000 on warheads, this in itself would reduce its advantage in throw weight.

Officials expect these conclusions to be challenged by Pentagon officials who want to limit throw weight to prevent what they call Soviet "barrage" and "breakout" abilities.

High levels of throw weight would allow Soviet missiles to carry large warheads that could "barrage" or spread over American missile fields and suppress a counterattack. The absence of a limit on throw weight, in the Pentagon view, may also enable the Russians to add extra warheads to missiles and thus "break out" of warhead limits.

According to officials, Pentagon experts and staff members of the National Security Council have been questioning predictions by the Central Intelligence Agency that Soviet modernization programs may well lead to reduced throw weight.

Many of these Pentagon and National Security Council officials are said to argue that it would be politically unwise to depart too much from a strong stand on throw weight as the key indicator of the worth of a missile treaty.